



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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(The King Crab Exploration Flat
Lands at Seattle, Thursday September 25)

Pictures available

ALASKAN KING CRAB VENTURE ASSURED COMPLETE SUCCESS

Positive assurance that "the giant king crab exists in numerous Alaskan waters in populations sufficient to support an industry", was brought today to Secretary Harold L. Ickes by R. H. Fiedler, Chief, Division of Fishery Industries, Fish and Wildlife Service, U. S. Department of the Interior, in general charge of the deep-sea fishing venture.

Recently returned from an inspection of the Service's new technological laboratory at Ketchikan (Alaska), Fiedler was able to contact leaders of the second expedition sent out early this year to locate the areas in Alaskan waters where king crabs schooled in greatest abundance. Although this was the main objective of this second part of the crab investigation, for which Congress last year appropriated \$100,000, the purpose of the entire venture was to determine the possibility of establishing an American commercial fishery and canning industry for this species of crab.

Japanese packers have conducted a fishery for these marine monsters, many of which weigh over 20 pounds, for many years off the Asiatic coast and near Alaska. United States firms, however, have not exploited a similar American fishery. This has been due principally to lack of adequate information regarding the areas in which the crabs congregated, their abundance, movement, or methods by which they could be caught in commercial quantities.

"In August of 1940, therefore," Fiedler reported to the Secretary, "an expedition of three vessels and a full complement of crews and scientists - consisting of technologist, fishery economist and engineer, biologist, and others - sailed from Seattle for the Bering Sea. On this first voyage, much valuable information was obtained on the biology and movement of king crabs, and extensive observations were made on their spawning habits, the moulting procedure, and the population migrations as related to moulting and spawning. The fishing observers also obtained data as to the relative merits of different types of gear under varying fishing conditions, and of the selectivity of the gear as influenced by the changing physical conditions of the crabs themselves. A large quantity of crabmeat was canned, as a practical experiment, resulting from catches of the first half of the expedition. The vessels returned to Seattle in December."

During the first portion of the venture, an attempt was made to fish thoroughly only the places where crabs were located in significant quantities. For the second voyage out, on the other hand, which set forth in February of this year, an attempt was made to cover as much territory as possible in order to determine the extent of the distribution of the Alaskan king crab populations. Consequently, the vessels have been leaving large bodies of the

crustacean as soon as some idea of the productivity of a particular area had been obtained. By early July, over 13,000 crabs had been caught and marked or returned to the sea, a 23-pounder being noted as the giant to that date.

"Two of the expedition's vessels, the Dorothy and the Locks", Fiedler reported, "have now begun their return voyage home, after having spent seven months exploring the waters from southeastern Alaska to Bering Sea, practically as far north as Bering Strait. (The Champion, third vessel in the venture, was returned to activity in regular Alaska fisheries.)

"The Locks left Bering Sea the last week in August, and has been rechecking areas on the south side of the Aleutian Peninsula, principally in the vicinity of Pavlof Bay, which were found to be productive earlier. Having continued eastward, and reinvestigated several areas around Kodiak Island, the Locks departed from Kodiak on September 16 to proceed to Cordova and other localities enroute to Seattle.

"The Dorothy, having completed the work contemplated for Bering Sea, departed from Dutch Harbor on the night of September 14, to join the Locks on the homeward journey."

(It is expected the vessels will reach Seattle about September 25 or 26.)

"In spite of several spells of fairly heavy weather," said Fiedler, "the vessels managed to operate the greater share of the time, with highly encouraging results. On one exploratory trip from the Pribilof Islands to St. Matthew and St. Lawrence Islands and back via Nunivak Island, the 93-foot schooner Dorothy spent but one night out of 33 in the shelter of a harbor. In the smaller 58-foot Locks, oilskins were the preferred and essential attire in the wheelhouse, in the galley, and in the fo'c'sle, as well as on deck, when working in the open waters of Bering Sea."

Crabs were taken over quite wide areas of Bering Sea from the time the vessels entered in late April until departing finally in early September. Of particular interest from the standpoint of commercial exploitation, Fiedler pointed out, was the fact that some of the largest catches were taken during April and May, August and September, preceding and following the salmon season.

"As an American enterprise, therefore," he indicated, "commercial king crab operations may well supplement established industries such as salmon canning, thus extending the season of fishery operations and giving longer periods of employment."

Besides obtaining information as to the location and distribution of king crabs in Alaskan waters, and the relative merit of various methods of fishing for them, considerable further biological data were also obtained on this second venture regarding their life history and habits, essential factors in prosecuting a fishery on an intelligent basis.

A large number of crabs were measured and several thousand of these were tagged during the first and second expedition, and a number of tagged ones have been recovered. Thus new light has been thrown on their migratory movements and rate of growth.

"Although Bering Sea was found to yield crabs in greater abundance and over far larger areas than elsewhere fished," Fiedler concluded in his report, "the waters of the Shumagin area, Kodiak Island, and Cook Inlet yield crabs in sufficient numbers to suggest the possibility of reasonable commercial exploitation there also."

King crabs were found in lesser number in many other areas, including parts of Prince William Sound and Yakutat Bay. A complete report of the investigation, including data on canning which was obtained during the first expedition, will be prepared as soon as the vessels return and the voluminous amount of data collected can be analyzed.

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